Notes to Preface

1. I am grateful to Barbara Frey Waxman’s postulation of a continuum of age to avoid a damaging young/old dichotomy (1990, 8).
2. See Margaret Morganroth Gullette’s pivotal essay “Age Studies as Cultural Studies” for an explanation of “age studies” as opposed to “aging studies” (2000b).
3. The impetus to describe old age as comprising stages, in the plural, comes from Erik Erikson, who has elucidated eight stages of psychosocial development that innovatively consider old age to contain development and not merely decline (1964). I suggest that old age can be further differentiated, though it is not the goal of the current study to name stages of psychosocial development.
4. I use the term fiction to refer to prose writing on paper and the term narrative fiction as a collective term for both film and such prose.
5. The process of growing old and male is distinct from, but related to, the processes I describe here, so that my study has relevance for ongoing cultural analyses of age and gender.

Notes to Introduction

1. The CBC did not save recordings of its ice storm coverage, so I have not been able to obtain a transcript. Some of the radio citations are from my very vivid memories and personal transcriptions of the broadcasts. Because of the emergency circumstances (e.g., working by candlelight), I was not able to keep as accurate a record of the dates and times of the particular quotations as I would have liked, so this analysis encompasses my impressions of a media event. References to “Voices of the Vulnerable” refer to the transcript that the CBC provided to me.
2. I refer here to a longstanding Cartesian tradition of separating mind and body. In Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, Elizabeth Grosz speaks of three scholarly legacies of that duality: the body regarded as object, the body figured as instrument, and the body as conduit of human expression (1994, 8–9).
3. The rhetoric of “visibility” pervades many identity-based social movements,
and Woodward firmly situates age studies in relation to other academic disciplines with similar goals in articulating a need for greater visibility, citing feminists such as Barbara Macdonald (ix). In her poignant essay, “Look Me in the Eye” (first published in the early 1980s), Barbara Macdonald renders the metaphor devastatingly concrete. She describes a situation wherein her physicality is interpreted as lacking in the context of another movement also seeking visibility for women (a Take Back the Night march); she explains, “this increased visibility of young women is certainly due in part to the efforts of the older women of the first wave” (1991, 37). A march monitor spots Macdonald amid marchers and speaks to her younger lover about Macdonald’s capacity to “keep up,” suggesting the sixty-five-year-old woman might be better off at the front of the march, reserved for those with difficulty marching. Macdonald, devastated, describes a disturbing process: “It becomes more clear that the present attitude of women in their twenties and thirties has been shaped since childhood by patriarchy to view the older woman as powerless, less important than the fathers and the children, and there to serve them both; and like all who serve, the older woman soon becomes invisible” (40).


5. In addition, three recent popular feminist explorations of aging (though again not quite the old age I discuss) emerge directly from feminism’s “the personal is the political” credo. As second-wave feminists age, they continue an autobiographical tendency in their writing and choose to write about menopause. In recent publications Gloria Steinem, Germaine Greer, and Betty Friedan have each written about late-life changes for women. Their works generalize from their own experiences and draw on a wide range of cultural data to impel further thinking about older women. But all personal narratives are necessarily delineated by a reliance on experience. Notably, all three well-known feminist writers cite a lack of role models for rethinking old age. As Greer puts it in The Change, there are “no signposts to show the way” (1992, 12). In a troubling ageist manual for aging, Getting Over Getting Older (the title of which represents old age as a disease or at least an affliction), Letty Pogrebin cites Friedan’s and Steinem’s calls for “nobility” and “power” in the “elder female” in contrast to her own refusal to “welcome age” (1996, 4).

6. Examples of such postcolonial criticism include Kumkum Sangari, who asks, “What are the modes of access into such nonmimetic fiction for contemporary Euro-American, academic, poststructuralist discourse? In what sense are the openings provided by the fiction itself and in what sense are they constructed by the critical discourse?” (1995, 143). I would elaborate on those questions to ask how younger readers can come to fiction about old age and to explore the degree to which the structure of fiction itself provides the opportunity for constructive depictions of age and the degree to which that constructive aging comes from a particular type of engagement with the texts.

7. In “The Race for Theory,” Barbara Christian explores the possibility that theorizing may occur in narrative forms (1988). She writes, “For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am quite inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking” (ibid., 68). I am interested in the process of theorizing that can take place in narrative forms and particularly in the creation of stories of aging as an example of that theorizing.
Notes

8. I have selected fiction and film for this study mostly because it is in those literary forms that I have witnessed the largest degree of constructive thinking about old age. A number of Canadian plays, especially in Quebec theater, have begun to take on issues of aging in similarly subversive ways, and dramaturgy is one direction Canadian age studies might take, following Anne Davis Basting’s lead in the United States. Opera is another field of study that may yet yield intriguing results when scrutinized with an eye to revising cultural understandings of old age. Another large area I do not touch on here is poetry. Recent work in this area includes a focus on the volumes of late-life creativity that have received considerable critical attention from Anne Wyatt Brown (1993), Carolyn H. Smith (1992), and Kathleen Woodward (1980) and Sylvia Henneberg’s as yet unpublished *The Creative Crone: Aging and the Poetry of May Sarton, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Adrienne Rich.*

9. I turn to spectatorship for my study in part because narrative film can have an effect similar to what I claim for novels and in part because I am also speaking of film. Spectatorship offers important commentary on the specularity of film, and, by extension, of novels, but I am also interested in its description of a process of engagement with narrative fiction that includes social and political aspects not just of current spectatorship but also of prospective spectatorship. Mayne herself draws on scholarship of reading, such as Janice Radway’s work on romance novels, because she feels it is relevant to film spectatorship. I turn to Mayne’s scholarship on cinema to comment upon both spectatorship and reading because, like her, I am interested in the larger social process in which each participates. However, a key difference exists between viewing and reading, in part because each invests in the visual in a decidedly different way (as mentioned in the above earlier discussion of Bakhtin, a key difference for age scholarship is the role of embodiment in film as opposed to written text). In my final chapter, I examine that key difference in connection with an innovative semi-documentary about aging, *The Company of Strangers.*

10. Woodward has profitably examined the relationship between the narratives within psychoanalysis and other cultural narratives in her *Aging and Its Discontents* (1991). Some of the essays she collects in *Figuring Age* delve further into the possibilities and limitations presented by a psychoanalytic approach to this subject (1999). Such work influences my own approach here, and in particular it guides my choice not to focus on or significantly draw from psychoanalytic perspectives. Others who find such work more compelling than I have already made crucial advances in the field of age studies with the help of psychoanalysis, and I think there is room for my own different approach in part because of that work. I also fear the possible drawbacks of psychoanalytic approaches to literature that risk treating characters as people and thereby merely diagnosing literary figures. Rosalie Murphy Baum’s essay on Margaret Laurence (1996) risks such a treatment to an effect different from the one I seek here. I want to be able to draw larger conclusions about literary effect than that a work is so “real” that its characters can be treated as subject to psychoanalysis. As Judith Mayne puts it, “However much film theorists may think otherwise, the therapeutic analytic situation is not identical or even analogous to the film analytic one, unless of course one wants to practice the kind of psychoanalyzing of authors or characters that has been discredited for some time” (1993, 59). I hope that my approach, concentrating on the degree to which characters and readers are constructed in terms of age identity, complements existing and current work that fits such age identity into a psychoanalytic framework.
Notes to Chapter 1

1. *Une mort très douce* (A Very Easy Death) describes Françoise de Beauvoir's dying of cancer and especially describes Simone de Beauvoir's interactions with her mother during that time. The moving testimony is more about disease than it is about old age; as de Beauvoir explains, “You do not die from being born, nor from having lived, nor from old age. You die from something. The knowledge that because of her age my mother’s life must soon come to an end did not lessen the horrible surprise: she had sarcoma” (1966, 92). Yet she chooses Dylan Thomas’s much-cited villanelle as epigraph (as does Margaret Laurence for *The Stone Angel* [1964]). The memoir contains especially memorable descriptions of her mother’s aging and dying body that highlight de Beauvoir’s general discomfort with physicality. She writes, “The sight of my mother’s nakedness jarred me. No body existed less for me: none existed more. Only this body, suddenly reduced by her capitulation to being a body and nothing more, hardly differed at all from a corpse—a poor defenceless carcass turned and manipulated by professional hands” (18). Elaine Marks comments on this ambivalence toward flesh, “What her writing is up to, and this must be a major source of the critics’ malaise, is the affirmation that incontinence, like death, is a great equalizer. ‘Jean Paul Sartre’ with bed sores and incontinent is not very different from ‘François de Beauvoir’ with bed sores and incontinent. Between the old man who wets his chair and the old woman who wets her bed, the readers of both sexes who await their turn (‘qui attendent leur tour,’ wrote Pascal) must read that, at the end, sexual difference fades and that the body that remains is the unrestrained, uncontrolled body of the old woman. It is precisely the body that Western culture and, ironically, Simone de Beauvoir herself have labored assiduously to hide” (1986, 199). Marks pinpoints the critical ambivalence within Simone de Beauvoir’s writing about old age. Although she devotes an entire treatise to the subject, she never fully reckons with the aging body.


3. Anne Wyatt-Brown’s “Future of Literary Gerontology” indicates that Margaret Morganroth Gullette has an article in press that praises de Beauvoir for her articulation of the social construction of old age (1993, 44). See Gullette (2000).

4. De Beauvoir stresses that memoir is a suitable venue for late-life creativity, perhaps in part because of her own late-life memoirs.

5. One aspect of de Beauvoir’s *Old Age* has received sustained critical attention as evidenced by Marilyn Pearsall’s volume of that name (*The Other within Us: Feminist Explorations of Women and Aging* [1997]). Pearsall opens the collection with a reference to looking in the mirror as an old woman, which leads into a brief discussion of how this one point in what she calls the “Coming of Age” derives quite logically from *The Second Sex*. As Pearsall notes, Woodward has also connected de Beauvoir’s works in the same way in her “Simone de Beauvoir: Aging and Its Discontents.” Waxman draws on this notion in her analyses of Reifungsromane (1990).
6. Along with Robert Dubreuilh (Perron and Dubreuilh are said to satirize Camus and Sartre respectively), Perron had fought in the Resistance. When Dubreuilh sets out to form a rival left party, Perron has to support him to some degree through his editorship of *L'espoir*, but defies him by sticking to what he considers an objective and frank report on Soviet work camps.

7. Featherstone and Hepworth have named the “mask of ageing” wherein the “outer body is seen as misrepresenting and imprisoning the inner self” (1995, 227).

**Note to Chapter 2**

1. Constance Beresford-Howe’s 1973 *Book of Eve* offers another example of a Canadian novel that follows Laurence’s model for depicting female familial relationships. In that novel, the only emotional ploy that succeeds with the elderly main character, Eva, is to mention her granddaughter Kim, whose scorn she fears and with whom she feels a unique bond that she has been able to sever with all of the other family members.